



West Texas
VA Health Care System
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Health Trends

Early is Better: **PREVENTING COLON CANCER**

By Thelma Colegrove RN

It has been estimated that one of every 18 people in the United States will develop colorectal (colon or rectal) cancer in their lifetime. An even scarier thought is that one person dies of this cancer every 10 minutes—about 50,000 every year. It is the third most diagnosed cancer in the United States and Canada and the second leading cause of cancer death among both men and women.

What does all this mean to you, the veteran? Because it is so widespread, it can easily touch our lives, our families or our friends. What can be done about it?

Early detection is the key to defeating this killer.

If colorectal cancer can be found early, treatment is more effective. Polyps can be removed before they become cancerous. And if cancer is present, early detection may mean a longer life. Usually, the longer the cancer is present, the lower the chances of surviving the disease.

In spite of the fact that this cancer is so widespread, it is one of the easiest to find and treat of any of the cancers. Over 90 percent of people who are diagnosed early with this cancer will survive more than five years. But, unfortunately, only about 40 percent of colorectal cancers are found this early.

Research has found some things which make it more likely that you will develop colorectal cancer. Some of the risk factors to look for are: age—over 50 years, a diet high in animal fats, not getting enough exercise or smoking a lot. Smokers are 30-40 percent more likely to die of this cancer. Heavy alcohol drinkers are also at risk. Another big risk factor is a family history of this kind of cancer. If your sister or father had colorectal cancer, you are at greater risk of developing it. People who have inflammatory bowel diseases or have close

relatives who have these diseases are at greater risk.

There are some things you can do to help prevent colon cancer: increase the calcium in your diet, eat more vegetables and increase your exercise. Taking one 325 mg coated aspirin daily may help reduce your chances of getting colon polyps and colon cancer, but you need to discuss this with your doctor before you start taking it.

A simple test that may help with early detection is the use of stool cards. We ask you to return to us the stool cards we provide you so we can check for blood that you may not be able to see in your stool. Other procedures to check for colon cancer are a flexible sigmoidoscopy, barium enema or a colonoscopy. Sig-

moidoscopies and colonoscopies are procedures performed by physicians using a scope to look at the inside surface of certain areas of the colon. A barium enema is a procedure involving the use of a special liquid as an enema followed by x-rays of the abdomen. Both the barium enema and the flexible sigmoidoscopy are useful in detecting polyps, but the colonoscopy is considered the best. During the colonoscopy procedure, the doctor can see all the way up the colon and even remove any polyps that he sees.

A polyp is a small growth that may hang down from the colon. They can be either cancerous or benign (not cancerous). Polyps grow at about half an inch in diameter every five years and it usually takes them about 5-10 years to turn into cancer. It then takes about 5-10 years for the cancer to cause symptoms, but by then it could be too late.

Because of the parts of the body this cancer affects, it is not discussed as much as others, but it is highly treatable if found early. Help your health care team help you have a longer, healthier life.

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You CAN live with osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis, is a joint disease that mostly affects cartilage.

Cartilage is the slippery tissue that covers the ends of bones in a joint. Healthy cartilage allows bones to glide over each other and helps absorb shock of movement.

In osteoarthritis, the top layer of cartilage breaks down and wears away, allowing bones under the cartilage to rub together. The rubbing causes pain, swelling, and loss of motion in the joint. Over time, the joint may lose its normal shape, and bone spurs may grow on the edges of the joint. Bits of bone or cartilage can break off and float inside the joint space, which causes more pain and damage.

People with osteoarthritis often have joint pain and reduced motion. Unlike some other forms of arthritis, osteoarthritis affects only joints and not internal organs. It can occur in any joint, but most often it develops in the hands, knees, hips, and spine.

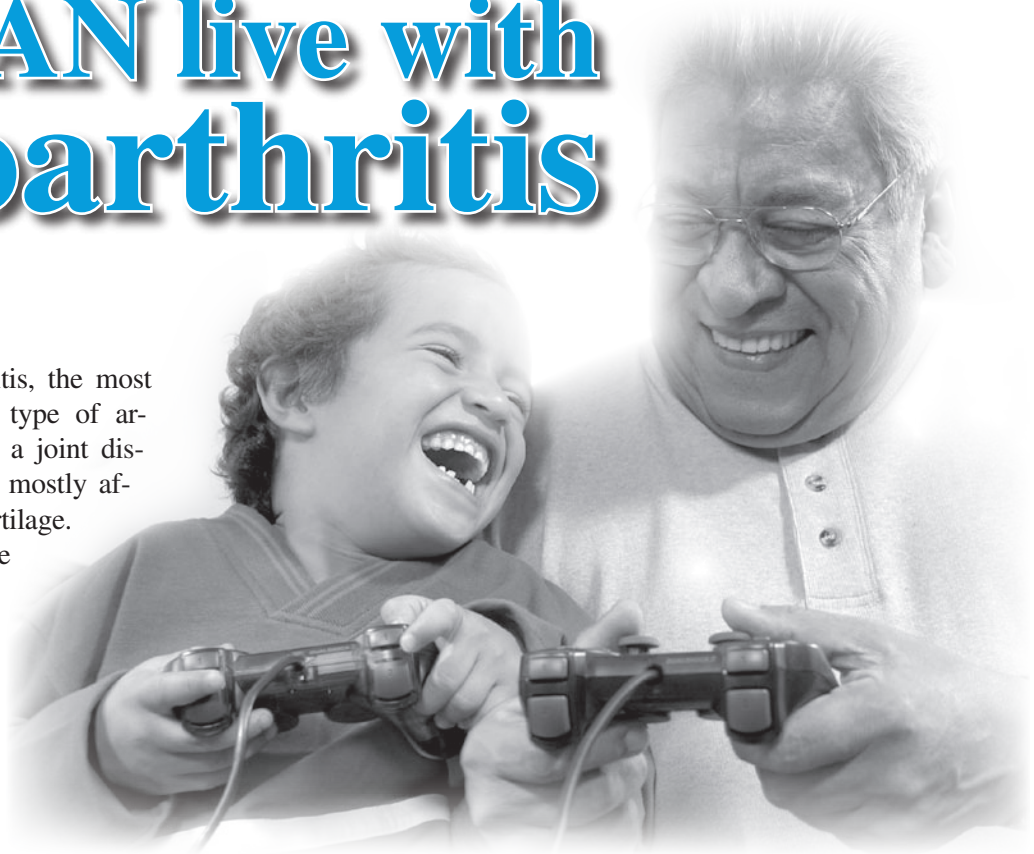
Warning signs of osteoarthritis are:

- ▶ Steady or on-and-off pain in a joint
- ▶ Stiffness in a joint after getting out of bed or sitting for a long time
- ▶ Swelling or tenderness in one or more joints
- ▶ A crunching feeling or the sound of bone rubbing on bone

How is osteoarthritis treated?

Doctors often combine treatments to fit a patient's needs, lifestyle, and health. Osteoarthritis treatment has four main goals:

- ▶ To improve joint care through rest and exercise
- ▶ To keep a healthy body weight
- ▶ To control pain
- ▶ To achieve a healthy lifestyle



Treatment plans can involve:

- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Weight control
- ▶ Rest and joint care
- ▶ Pain relief
- ▶ Medicines
- ▶ Alternative therapies
- ▶ Surgery

Self-management programs and a good-health attitude can help people:

- ▶ Understand the disease and reduce pain while staying active
- ▶ Cope with their body, mind, and emotions
- ▶ Have more control over the disease
- ▶ Live an active, independent life
- ▶ Focus on their strengths, not their weaknesses
- ▶ Build fitness and healthy eating into their daily routines
- ▶ Develop ways to lower and manage stress

With proper management, many of the symptoms of osteoarthritis can be reduced and you can continue to enjoy many activities. Osteoarthritis is a disease you can live with!

MILK

Good For You at Any Age

Y

ou grew up hearing that milk builds healthy bodies, but did you know that it also helps to maintain one?

Milk not only supports bone health by fighting osteoporosis, it also fights hypertension, colon cancer, and could help you lose weight!

☒ **Bones:**

One of the most significant factors in reducing the risk of fracture as you age is through calcium intake. Calcium is vital in muscle contraction and relaxation, blood clotting and the transmission of nerve impulses. If you don't get the calcium you need in order for your body to function properly, it will pull it from your bones. Include at least three servings of dairy products to your menu each day to maintain healthy bones.

☒ **Weight loss:**

Recent research shows that by including 24 ounces of low fat or fat free milk a day in your reduced calorie diet, you will burn more fat and lose more weight than by just cutting calories. In one study, participants consuming three to four servings of milk or milk products per day in a reduced calorie diet averaged weight losses of 24 pounds in 24 weeks. Studies also indicate that more weight will be lost in the abdominal area when milk is included in the diet.

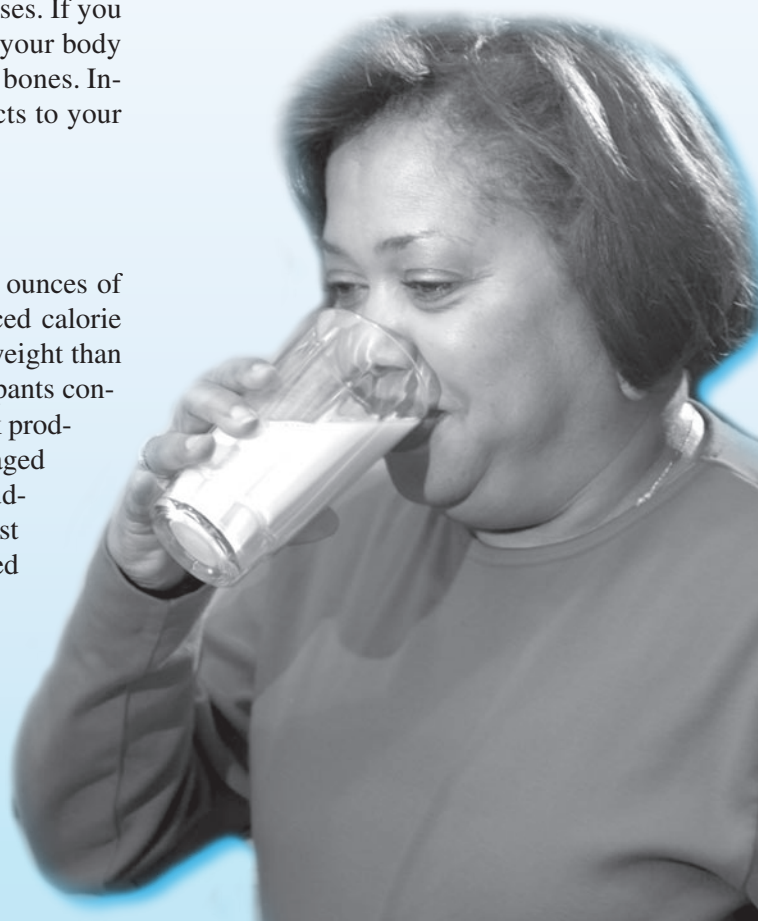
☒ **Hypertension:**

One in four Americans suffers from hypertension, the leading cause of heart disease and stroke. Numerous studies indicate that including low fat or fat free milk in your low fat diet will help to reduce hypertension.

☒ **Cancer:**

Recent research indicates that consuming at least three servings of low fat dairy products per day may help to reduce the risk of colon cancer, the third leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Although this area of research is new, studies have shown positive benefits.

Drink a glass of milk with your grandkids, make a low fat milkshake, eat some cottage cheese, add a slice of cheese to your sandwich, enjoy some yogurt – and remember – milk is good for you at any age.



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

75th Anniversary

On July 21, 2005, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) celebrated its 75th birthday. Anniversaries of any sort tend to evoke similar reflections: the legacy of the past and the promise of the future. The 75th anniversary of the Department of Veterans Affairs is no different.

On July 21, 1930, with the stroke of a pen, President Herbert Hoover consolidated all government activities related to veterans matters into a single agency. In doing so, President Hoover created the original Veterans Administration and set this nation on a course of caring for veterans in ways we doubt he could have imagined.

In 1930, VA treated 54,000 patients in 54 hospitals nationwide. Seventy-five years later, our patient rolls have increased nearly 100 fold, with some 5.2 million patients receiving treatment at 157 VA Medical Centers and more than 850 community clinics. Today, VA runs the nation's largest integrated health care system. Our staff will treat veterans with more than 50 million outpatient visits this year and fill more than 100 million prescriptions.

VA professionals do their jobs so well that a recent RAND Corporation study revealed that VA patients receive significantly better care than private-sector patients. The headline of a July 18 article in *U.S. News*

and *World Report* noted VA hospitals "are models of top-notch care," and a January 2005 article in the *Washington Monthly* aptly described the VA Medical System as "the best care anywhere."

The Veterans Health Administration is also responsible for more than 10,000 medical research projects that are currently underway. Over the years, this legacy of research has resulted in VA playing a key role in the development of the cardiac pacemaker, the CT scan, and improvements in the treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes and other ailments.

VA has been home to three Nobel Prize winners, and more than half of the physicians practicing medicine in the United States today received some of their training at a VA Medical Center. In this way, VA touches the lives of virtually all Americans.

VA remains a most remarkable story in American history. On July 21, we began a year-long observance of the 75th anniversary

of VA and it is our pledge to use this occasion to build on the VA legacy. It is a legacy of a governmental department staffed by more than 235,000 professionals dedicated to one proposition: to care for those who have borne the battle, and their widows and their orphans. We are the agents of the American people who want us to care for those who have cared for us, many with their lives and limbs.



West Texas VA Health Care System
300 Veterans Blvd.
Big Spring, TX 79720



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representatives at (432) 264-4839.

If you would like information on how
to quit smoking, call (432) 263-7361 ext. 5373
or 1-800-472-1365.

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